

Civil Service Reform Attempts in Pakistan

Dr Iffat Idris
GSDRC, University of Birmingham
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What are the key issues relating to civil service failings? In the past 10-15 years, what are the different reform ideas/approaches that have been proposed or pursued, and how effective have these been? What potential openings are there to support civil service reform in Pakistan?

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1. Summary

Pakistan's civil service has undergone significant changes since the country gained independence, notably a rise in political interference, and militarisation. It now faces serious problems, which undermine its effectiveness, and in turn Pakistan's ability to promote growth and development. There is widespread recognition of the problems and what needs to be done to address these, but civil service reform faces major barriers, largely political in nature. In 2021 the Institutional Reform Cell (IRC), set up by the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaaf (PTI) government of Imran Khan, prepared a directory of agreed reforms, as well as recommended reforms. The current government has also made reform proposals, but the challenge as ever is implementation. Donor projects in relation to the civil service have focused on technical and capacity building support, and there is scope to continue this, but perhaps more effective would be awareness-raising and advocacy to overcome political barriers to civil service reform.

This review looks at attempts to reform the civil service in Pakistan, focusing on the problems it faces, barriers to reform, and recent attempts to bring this about. The review draws on a mixture of academic and grey literature. While there is a substantial body of literature on the history of the civil service in Pakistan, and the problems with its structure and functioning, far less was found on the actual implementation status of reforms that have been agreed, or on (donor) interventions to support civil service reform. The literature was found to be gender blind, and made no mention of persons with disabilities. Key findings are as follows:

- ▶ **Structure:** Pakistan has an extensive civil service, comprising federal, provincial and local levels, and divided across ministries/departments as well as (semi-) autonomous bodies. Within the civil service, positions are categorised as Basic Pay Scales (BPS) 1-22; officers are BPS 17-22. The structure of the service (and recruitment mechanisms) influence its functioning and effectiveness.

Problems

- ▶ **Political interference:** Reforms introduced under PM Bhutto in the early 1970s paved the way for widespread political interference in the civil service, notably by removing constitutional protections and allowing lateral entry. Today, political elites have a very influential role in civil servants' recruitment, transfer and postings – making bureaucrats dependent on political favour. Overall, political interference has undermined the calibre, independence and functioning of the civil service.
- ▶ **Militarisation:** Over the course of Pakistan's history, military involvement in the civil service has progressively increased. Initially, bureaucrats were 'junior partners' of military regimes; later serving/retired military personnel joined the civil service; and now many senior positions are filled by the military.
- ▶ **Other problems:** Pakistan's civil service is too big, and bottom heavy – with too many lower tier personnel, but insufficient senior tier officers with the requisite professional skills. Overall calibre and capacity has fallen; training opportunities are limited and not suited to needs; pay scales are skewed (senior officers are underpaid compared to the private sector, vice versa for lower tiers); bureaucratic

corruption is seen at individual and organisational level, facilitated by lack of transparency and accountability; and performance evaluation is weak. Inter-services rivalry and over-centralisation are further problems.

- **Knock-on effects:** Failings in the civil service lead to shortcomings in delivery of service, and in the country's overall development and growth.

Historic attempts at reform

- **Long history:** Pakistan has an extensive record of setting up bodies to assess the problems with the civil service, and propose reforms to address these. There is broad consensus on what needs to be done. However, other than the reforms introduced in the 1970s, there has been no progress on major reform.
- **Barriers:** Civil service reform is opposed by vested interests in the civil service itself, as well political elites and military. Political will for reform is also eroded by the lack of short-term returns, and political instability. There is a lack of ownership of reforms because these are seen as coming from authoritarian regimes and/or donor-driven. The scale of reform needed – a radical overhaul of the whole system – means it is a very difficult task; piecemeal measures have little impact.

Recent efforts

- **Government commitment:** The PTI government under PM Imran Khan was strongly committed to civil service reform, and the current government has also presented proposals in this regard. Civil sector reform features in Pakistan's Vision 2025 document.
- **IRC:** This was set up to look at government functioning as a whole, including civil service reform. Its 2021 report listed agreed reforms, as well as those under deliberation. Agreed reforms include measures to improve training, performance evaluation, internal accountability, remove the federal bias in the civil service; merit-based promotion policy, with directed retirement for under-performing personnel; increase security of tenure; and create incentives for professionals from the private sector to join the civil service. Proposed reforms include drastic changes to the recruitment process.
- **Role of donors:** Donors have supported some projects to build capacity and provide technical support to different aspects of the civil service. There is scope to expand this, but what is perhaps most needed are interventions to build a constituency in favour of reform.

2. Civil service in Pakistan

The civil service in Pakistan was created out of and based on the Indian Civil Service (ICS), which was formed when the Indian Subcontinent was under British rule. The ICS comprised an elite group of Indian civil servants who supported the British in administering the country; they formed the 'steel framework' on which the empire rested. Upon independence in 1947, the Pakistan civil service retained the same features of elitism and control of the core administrative functions, while enjoying even greater power. Subsequent developments have

significantly changed the calibre and role of the civil service; while it remains a powerful institution, it is hampered by major problems.

Structure

The civil service in Pakistan is extensive, covering federal, provincial and local levels, and including numerous affiliated autonomous or semi-autonomous organisations, e.g. regulatory bodies. ‘Secretariats form the nucleus of the civil administration at the centre and provinces’ (ICG, 2010: 12). Each federal and provincial ministry is divided into administrative divisions, each headed by a senior civil servant (as well as a minister – an elected parliamentarian), with additional, joint and deputy secretaries below them. Each provincial administration is headed by a chief secretary.

Positions in the civil service are categorised as Basic Pay Scales (BPS) 1-22, with BPS 1-4 comprising unskilled workers, BPS 5-15 clerical personnel, BPS 16 superintendents, and BPS 17-22 officers (ICG, 2010: 5). Recruitment to BPS 1-16 is through departmental-level processes (Badshah & Timchenko, 2019: 158). Recruitment to BPS 17-22 is through two main routes: sitting the Central Superior Services (CSS) exam (an annual nationwide exam); and direct induction of military officers. The Federal Public Services Commission (FPSC) is in charge of recruitment for BPS 17 and above at federal level, and the equivalent Provincial Public Services Commissions carry out the same role in each province (albeit there is no quota for military inductees at provincial level).

Civil service officers (BPS 17 and above) fall into one of three unified grades (Badshah & Timchenko, 2019: 158-160):

- All Pakistan Unified Grades (APUG) – comprising District Management Group (DMG), Police Group, Secretariat Group.
- Federal Unified Grades (FUG) – comprising 12 occupational groups: Accounts; Commerce and Trade; Customs and Excise; DMG; Foreign Affairs; Income Tax; Information; Military Lands and Cantonment; Office Management; Police; Postal; and Railways.
- Provincial Unified Grades.

All officers recruited through the CSS undergo a common pre-service training programme, followed by specialist trainings by their respective services (tax, foreign affairs, etc.) (ICG, 2010: 18). Further training is conducted in-service, and is a requirement for promotion to higher grades.

Federal officers can be appointed to any level (federal, provincial or local), while provincial officers are restricted to positions in their respective provinces. Officers fall into one of two categories: staff officers (generalists) and line officers (specialists). Broadly, staff officers set policy direction, while line officers implement projects. The former therefore rank higher and have considerable scope to move across departments and institutions; technocrats tend to be restricted to their parent departments, meaning they have fewer opportunities to progress (ICG, 2010: 13).

Problems

The civil service is hampered by numerous problems. Before listing these, it is important to describe two developments which radically changed the nature of the civil service, and to which many of the current problems can be traced. The first is political interference and the second is militarisation of the civil service.

Political interference

Prime Minister Zulfikar Bhutto took power in 1973, after years of military rule and following the break-up of Pakistan and creation of Bangladesh. He sought to weaken the civil service and place it under the control of the political executive by introducing radical reforms. As well as sacking large numbers of civil servants, Bhutto removed a number of constitutional provisions designed to prevent political interference in the bureaucracy. 'These protections, which were present in the 1956, 1962 and interim 1972 constitutions, included safeguards against dismissal, reduction in rank or compulsory retirement of public servants' (Wilder, 2009: 22). Their withdrawal 'destroyed the civil service by opening the floodgates of political interference' (ICG, 2010: 5). Bhutto also opened the civil service up to 'lateral entry' whereby people could be appointed to senior positions in the civil service without having taken the CSS exam and worked their way up the bureaucratic ranks. Though touted as a means to bring external qualified personnel into the service, in practice, 'Diverse governments used the lateral entry system to induct politically associated individuals to the CSP, leading to the undermining of merit-based appointments' (Badshah & Timoshenko, 2019: 155).

Since Bhutto's reforms, political interference in the civil service has become the norm. Promotion of civil servants is supposed to be based on a combination of seniority and merit, but according to one civil servant, 'It is commonplace for officers with political or military connections to get the most prized postings on offer, leaving those without similar clout dispirited and demoralised' (ICG, 2010: 19). Wilder (2009: 22) echoes this: 'It has become increasingly difficult for civil servants to get postings, transfers or promotions without the support of a political patron'. This leads officers to either seek to curry favour with politicians, or remove themselves from postings where they will be under political pressure to act in a way they shouldn't, or leave the civil service altogether (Husain, 2022). All of these undermine the calibre of the civil service.

Politicians also use the civil service as a means to providing patronage. 'Patronage is the so-called "stuff" of politics in Pakistan, and the most politically important form of patronage is providing jobs in the bureaucracy. Employment is the number one demand placed on politicians from their constituents in a patron client system' (Wilder, 2009: 31). This has obvious implications for both capacity, and the size (over-staffing) of the civil service.

Finally, political interference means significant changes each time a new government is elected. 'Every regime change is invariably accompanied by broad transfers and postings of officials at the policy-making levels in the secretariats as well as at the operational level in the districts' (ICG, 2010: 1). This causes obvious disruption and undermines performance.

Militarisation

In the early decades of military rule under General Ayub Khan, the bureaucracy were 'co-opted [...] as a willing junior partner' by the military, leading to weakening of democratic

norms and institutions (ICG, 2010). Under General Zia-ul-Haq the pattern changed to direct appointment of military officers to the civil service: quotas were put in place for this (Wilder, 2009: 22). The next military ruler, General Pervez Musharraf, went even further. Musharraf 'significantly expanded the system of appointing serving and retired military personnel to civil service posts, violating rules and quotas and deepening the military's control over the civil service' (ICG, 2010: 1). For most of his time in power, 'all the major civil service institutions were headed by retired military officers' including the FPSC itself, and the two main training institutions for mid-level and senior officers (Wilder, 2009: 24).

Musharraf was Pakistan's last direct military ruler. Since his ouster, a hybrid system of government has emerged, whereby there are elected civilian governments but the military exert significant 'behind the throne' power and influence, in particular over security and foreign policy. This extends to the civil service. Serving and retired military officers continue to hold senior positions in the administration. Furthermore, reports by military intelligence agencies on senior bureaucrats are often a decisive factor in the promotions of those officers – 'yet another way of subordinating the civil bureaucracy to military rule' (ICG, 2010: 19). As with political interference, militarisation of the civil service erodes professionalism and integrity, and pressures bureaucrats to act at the behest of the military.

The above two factors – political interference and militarisation – are problems in themselves, but they also lead to/exacerbate further problems. These are described in brief below:

Numbers and structure: The civil service in Pakistan is bloated. As of 2010, there were 2.4 million regular civil servants for the then population of 170 million, equivalent to one civil servant for 67 citizens – this compares to one civil servant for every 110 citizens in India (ICG, 2010: 1). In addition the Pakistani civil service is 'bottom heavy': unskilled and semi-skilled personnel account for 95% of federal and provincial government employees (Husain, 2022: 4). There is a mismatch between needs and staffing: many parts of the civil service have too many staff, while others are under-staffed and/or lack staff with the requisite skills and experience. One factor in this uneven distribution is reluctance on the part of civil servants to be posted outside their home area/province or to remote areas (ICG, 2009). Another is ineffective assignment of officers. It is not uncommon for specialists passing the CSS exam to be assigned to occupational groups which are completely unrelated to their speciality, e.g. doctors passing the CSS being sent to the Police Group (ICG, 2010: 17).

Capacity: The overall calibre of those applying to and working in the civil service has fallen. While some are still attracted by the perceived prestige of being a senior bureaucrat, others are motivated to join by opportunities for corruption and/or lack of alternative jobs for educated people (Wilder, 2009). But the brightest and best are no longer opting for the civil service, or are not staying (Husain, 2022). Further factors leading to poor capacity are limited/unsuitable training opportunities for civil servants and weak performance evaluation.

Training: Following the training provided to all civil servants on recruitment, further in-service opportunities depend on their position and the institution they are working for. There are greater opportunities, including for trainings at foreign universities/institutions, for federal officers, and for generalists. This is despite the fact that specialists (technocrats) make up a far bigger share of recruits (as of 2010, roughly 700 specialists were hired annually compared to 150-200 generalists) (ICG, 2010: 18). This discrepancy in training widens the

gap between generalists and specialists, and between federal and provincial civil servants. Ultimately, it 'undermines the government's ability to formulate and implement projects that require specialised input' (ICG, 2010: 18). A further problem is a 'shortage of qualified and motivated instructors in government training programs [...] Most instructors are serving officers who regard these postings as punishments' (ICG, 2010: 18).

Low pay and benefits: Government employees in lower grades (BPS 1-16) are paid relatively well compared to the private sector, and unlike the latter enjoy job security. The bottom heavy distribution of the civil service means that 85% of the salary bill goes on lower grades (Husain, 2022: 4). This leaves little for officer cadres (BPS 17-22); they are paid significantly less than the private sector, and the gap is widening. One reason was salary compression in the civil service, whereby the ratio of the salary of the highest grade to the salary of the lowest grade 'was drastically cut down to great disadvantage of the officers cadre' (Husain, 2022: 3). They are also at a disadvantage compared to their military counterparts who enjoy extensive non-salary benefits, e.g. free quality healthcare, domestic staff. 'Low salaries and pensions and inadequate welfare programs for civil servants have [...] encouraged widespread corruption, while at the same time lowering morale and increasing inefficiency' (ICG, 2010: 16). This also has knock-on effects on recruitment: 'an increasingly dynamic and growing private sector [...] means that the brightest young graduates can now earn considerably more' there than in the civil service (Wilder, 2009: 26).

Corruption: Bureaucratic corruption is in part a legacy of the colonial era, when officers had considerable discretionary powers. These have increased over time, creating opportunities for corruption and exploitation. Indeed, it is the norm in Pakistan for citizens to pay bribes for services that should be readily available to them, e.g. to secure utilities connections, or to prevent abuse, e.g. by the police. As well as such corruption at individual-level, it is found at organisational level. One form is institutionalised corruption, whereby a government body provides cover to its own corrupt officials, seen for example in the award of government contracts (ICG, 2010: 16). Another is participatory corruption, involving collusion between the bureaucracy and the private sector. This 'is particularly prevalent in Pakistan's tax administration [...] the income tax and customs and excise departments [are] among the most corrupt in the country' (ICG, 2010: 16).

Lack of transparency and accountability: Bureaucratic corruption is facilitated by 'the deterioration in both internal and external accountability mechanisms' (ICG, 2010: 16). Accountability of civil servants to their seniors (in a chain which should lead up to ministers and thereafter parliament) is undermined by a number of factors including: poor training; lack of merit in determining appointments and promotions; weak regulatory mechanisms; weak standard operating procedures; lack of updated rules; and poor practices and norms (ICG, 2010: 16). Performance evaluations are especially critical: in Pakistan annual confidential reports (ACRs) rarely if ever note criticisms. A senior bureaucrat summed up the decline: 'Today there is far greater acceptance of corruption and abuse of authority not only within the bureaucracy itself but also in society in general' (ICG, 2010: 16).

Performance evaluation: There are serious shortcomings in the current performance management system for civil servants in Pakistan. This is an annual exercise for all personnel. However, it is undermined by lack of clear job descriptions, which in turn means lack of clear parameters against which to judge performance (Hanif et al, 2016). A one size

fits all approach is taken, whereby officers in very different occupational groups are judged against the same indicators. Furthermore, performance evaluation does not take into account additional/new tasks (not included in their original job description) that officers have to carry out, e.g. adapting to a new local government system, disaster management (Hanif et al, 2016). Lack of computerisation makes it difficult to access performance evaluation reports (PERs) or to follow up on these when an officer is transferred. In addition, performance evaluation is often treated as a formality, and not taken seriously. However, by far the most serious impediment is political interference. According to a senior bureaucrat, ‘merit starts deteriorating when no matter how sluggish or dim witted the officer is, he/she gets good scoring on PER and also better transfer and places of posting on the basis of political connections’ (Hanif et al, 2016: 111).

Inter-services rivalry: There is rivalry, even acrimony, between different groups, and between federal and provincial levels of the civil service. International Crisis Group (ICG, 2010: 13) describe the federal secretariat, in particular, as ‘an arena of competition and rivalry among services – because control over the secretariat means control over policy-making and the federal government’. As noted above, federal officers can serve in provincial posts, but not vice versa. Federal officers often occupy senior provincial posts, leading to resentment among their provincial counterparts. Lack of opportunities for training, career development and promotion also means provincial officers have little incentive to work diligently, and makes them more inclined towards corruption (ICG, 2010: 13). Overall, divisions and rivalry undermine the effectiveness of the civil service.

Over-centralisation: Decision-making in the Pakistan civil service is highly centralised: even relatively minor postings and funding allocations have to be approved by very senior bureaucrats/ministers (ICG, 2010: 15). Cumbersome rules and procedures exacerbate the problem. All these factors have led to a culture of inertia among officials: ‘Even where clearly defined powers to handle a given situation exist, most concerned officers will be reluctant to exercise them, preferring instead to transfer responsibility upwards or sideways’ (ICG, 2010: 15). The end result is a slow and creaking administration, in which projects can be delayed by months, years or longer.

3. Civil service reform: importance and obstacles

Importance of civil service reform

Husain (2022: 2) identifies the features that had made the Indian Civil Service before Partition so effective: a) constitutional protection; b) political neutrality; c) permanency; d) security of tenure; e) anonymity; f) recruitment based on open competition and merit; and g) rigorous post-induction training. As seen above, many of these have been undermined, notably by political interference and militarisation of the civil service.

The failings in the civil service in turn lead to shortcomings in delivery of services, and the country’s overall development and growth. Wilder (2009: 19) notes that:

The ineffectiveness of state institutions due to the diminishing capacity, over-politicization and corruption of the bureaucracy and its political masters is seriously undermining Pakistan's economic, social and political development. In addition, the

failure of Pakistan's state institutions to protect the welfare of its citizens, provide adequate social services and promote the rule of law are eroding the legitimacy and stability of the state.

Husain (2022: 2) cites good governance as vital for 'sustainable and equitable development', stressing that, 'One of the main institutions required for good governance is a competent, neutral, honest bureaucracy'. He adds that, 'an efficient and competent civil service' is required to create 'an enabling environment for private businesses'. (Husain, 2022: 2). Critically, 'For ordinary citizens, it is civil servants who are most germane to their daily life' (Husain, 2022: 2). Wilder (2009) points out that, in the absence of an effective civil service, neither government nor donor funds will yield significant benefits.

There has long been recognition of the need for civil service reform in Pakistan. 'Over the course of the past sixty years there have been more than twenty studies on administrative reform prepared by various government committees or commissions [...] that have clearly identified the most serious problems' Wilder (2009: 21). Rana (2022: 58) echoes this: 'The Government has constituted around 40 Commissions and Committees since 1947 to reorganize and reform the civil service'. The last of those before the current era was the National Commission on Government Reform (NCGR).

National Commission for Government Reform (NCGR)

The NCGR was set up in 2006, and tasked with analysing government functioning and making recommendations on how this could be made more effective to meet the challenges Pakistan faced in the 21st century. The commission was chaired by Dr Ishrat Husain, a former Governor of the State Bank of Pakistan, with wide experience both in Pakistan and internationally. Over a two-year period, the Commission carried out extensive consultations with stakeholders from both the public and private sectors, and at all levels (federal, provincial, local). In May 2008 it produced its report. This called for an inclusive approach giving equal opportunities to generalists and specialists; strengthened district level services; improvement in the citizen-administration interface; a holistic approach to human resource management with stress on transparency, accountability and merit-based approaches; promotion of e-Government to increase efficiency and reduce corruption; and improvement in delivery of essential public services (esp. education, health, police, land revenue) (NCGR, 2008). The NCGR's recommendations were to be implemented over a 10-15 year period.

Obstacles to reform

Despite this huge amount of work to identify solutions, 'there is a long history of failed reform attempts [...] most reform recommendations have remained unimplemented. [...] Only those reforms that recommended minor changes and adjustments - in other words, short-term objectives - have been implemented' (Badshah & Timoshenko, 2019: 168-169). Bhutto's reforms in the early 1970s constitute the large major transformation in the civil service of Pakistan – and as seen, they undermined rather than improved it.

Civil service reform in Pakistan faces significant obstacles:

Resistance from the civil service: Husain (2022: 18) notes that 'those already in the system have developed vested interest in the existing arrangement'. They therefore 'make

every possible effort to resist such changes that divest them of their power, perks and status'. This resistance applies not just to the most senior bureaucrats. As noted, lower grade personnel enjoy wages and job security that they would not have in the private sector. They are therefore opposed to moves to downsize (trim off the excess in the service, largely found in lower tiers). Wilde (2009: 26) cites the example of salaries: if these are raised (as needed) for the top 5% of civil servants to make them more competitive with private sector, the other 95% will protest and strike.

Lack of political will: As with vested interests resisting change from within the civil service, so the same resistance is found among political elites. These benefit from having pliant bureaucrats, and the ability to transfer/remove those who are not. 'The main challenge is that the politicians and military officers who would need to bring about this change prefer to have a weak and subservient civil service rather than a strong and independent one' (Wilde, 2009: 23). Even among progressive politicians who recognise the need for civil service reform, there can be little political will to carry this out. Husain (2022: 17) explains this as due to 'asymmetry in the accrual of benefits and the incurrence of costs in undertaking reforms'. While the political costs of pushing change will be borne by the party initiating reforms, 'the benefits are likely to be realized over an extended period of time beyond their tenure of office'. Moreover, the benefits will be diffuse, widespread and not concentrated in a single defined group. There is thus little incentive for politicians (even if they were willing) to undertake civil service reform.

Political instability: This is a critical factor in Pakistan, which has seen only a handful of elected civilian governments complete their full term in office. 'The short tenure of governments has helped create an environment where the incentives are to focus on short-term political (and financial) gain rather than on achieving mid- to longer-term policy objectives' (Wilde, 2009: 19). Even where they do take a longer perspective, if unable to complete their term, a new government could decide to drop those policies.

Lack of ownership: Badshah and Timoshenko (2019: 169) argue that the fact that reforms have been introduced by authoritarian governments (notably by Bhutto, Zia-ul-Haq and Musharraf) means their formulation 'has not generated a feeling a sense of ownership among the members of the civil service in particular and Pakistani society in general'. They add that reforms 'have not been based on public engagement, on honestly recognising potential bureaucratic losers, or on strategies for how to tackle them'. Wilde (2009: 19) stresses that lack of progress on civil service reform 'is due primarily to political factors and ineffective political strategies for pushing through reforms'.

Donor-driven reforms: Closely related to the above is the fact that civil service reforms (as often with wider governance/rights reforms in Pakistan) are seen by many as being donor-driven. 'Most of these reforms were introduced by international organizations such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund as a loan condition, yet without communicating the aims of the reforms to the various levels within the civil service hierarchy' (Badshah & Timoshenko, 2019: 168). This perception exacerbates the lack of ownership, and the difficulties in introducing and implementing reforms.

Scale of task: As seen, there are major problems in all aspects of the civil service in Pakistan – structure, recruitment, training, performance evaluation, etc. In order to be effective, a 'root and branch' overhaul of the Pakistani civil service is needed. Tinkering

around the edges, bringing about small changes here and there, will not work. But the very scale of the task is what makes it so difficult to undertake.

4. Recent reform attempts by government

Renewed government commitment

The Government of Pakistan's Vision 2025 includes plans to reform the civil service. Indeed, it promises 'a complete overhaul of the civil services' (GoP, n.d: 53). Specific commitments in relation to the diverse problems outlined above are as follows (GoP, n.d.: 53-54):

- **Training:** '(F)ocus will also be given to reform in the education and training of civil service officers through a dedicated center of excellence, the National University of Public Policy and Administration (NUPPA). Reforms in the training curriculum and methodology at the various public official training institutes will mirror changes in government functioning so that public officials are adequately prepared for a FAST government that emphasizes outcomes i.e. delivery of services.'
- **Calibre:** 'A redefinition of positions and designations with professional qualification, and a career track with specialization for government officers will be introduced which will lead to professionalism in each field of work.'
- **Processes:** 'A restructuring of approval processes and procedures will be taken in hand to cut red tape and decisively upgrade the quality of decision making at all echelons.'
- **Performance evaluation:** 'A system of performance evaluation of public servants based on work performed rather than subjective evaluation will be practiced. [...] An official will be expected to work towards specific deliverables which will be formulated not so much in input-output terms as in outcomes-impact terms.'

Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaaf (PTI) was elected to power in 2018 and its leader Imran Khan became prime minister. PTI, and Imran Khan personally, were strongly committed to reforming the civil service.

The new government under PM Shehbaz Sharif has also issued statements in support of civil service reform. In February 2023 the Ministry of Planning, Development and Special Initiatives (P, D & SI) shared a number of proposals (see below) to bring about significant reform. Announcing the proposals, Minister of P, D & SI Ahsan Iqbal remarked (Abbas, 2023):

in view of the emerging digital revolution and resultant empowerment of the citizens, the public sector needs to reinvent itself, in order to ensure quality service delivery [...] Public sector needs to be agile and innovative to meet the new challenges. It is high time that Pakistan improves professional capacity in the public sector and aligns recruitment and training systems with the new dynamics.

Institutional Reform Cell: agreed and proposed reforms

An Institutional Reform Cell (IRC) was set up in 2018, under the highly respected Dr Ishrat Husain. The IRC was tasked with analysing and identifying solutions in four areas:

restructuring of the federal government; civil service reforms; business process re-engineering; and strengthening key public sector institutions. The IRC was in place for three years and carried out extensive consultations. The IRC made a wide range of recommendations for reform of the civil service (as well as the other three areas it looked at). In its 2021 report, these were divided between those that had been agreed (including measures already in the pipeline, prior to the IRC's establishment) and those proposed by the Commission but under deliberation (as of 2021). Key reforms are listed below, based on the IRC report (IRC, 2021) and Dawn (2021).

It should be noted that, while the report details agreed reforms, in many cases the implementation status of these was unclear. A Cabinet Committee on Institutional Reforms (CCIR) was set up, tasked with meeting regularly to monitor implementation of all the reforms (in all four areas of its mandate) included in the report. The CCIR falls under the Establishment Division, but no details of its current activities are given on the latter's website.

Agreed reforms (as of 2021)

Training

- Post-induction training in government functioning (structure, procedures, rules, regulations) and soft skills (e.g. team building) are to be provided for 3-6 months to those entering the federal government in cadre or non-cadre positions.
- For specialised cadres, training will be split into common training (for all officers) followed by domain (subject) specific training at Specialised Training Institutes (STIs).
- Trainings are to be organised by the National School of Public Policy (NSPP) at Islamabad and all four provincial capitals. NSPP is to be the apex body for standard setting, monitoring and quality assistance.
- To attract high calibre officers to STIs the selection method of faculty, incentive structures, etc. will be brought at par with those of NSPP. All training institutes will be made autonomous with their own Board of Governors drawn from academia, practitioners, retired bureaucrats, etc., and linkages will be made with leading universities and research organisations.

Performance evaluation

- There will be a performance contract between the PM and each cabinet minister. The performance indicators against which officers in each ministry will be assessed, will derive from these contracts. Targets set for officers will be objective and measurable.
- The performance evaluation report (PER) is to be restructured to have the following sections: i) objectives and goals for the year; ii) key performance indicators (KPIs); iii) evaluation by reporting officer; iv) development/training needs.
- Under a forced ranking system, only 20% of officers can be marked as 'Outstanding', 30% as 'Very Good', 30% as 'Good', 10% as 'Average' and 10% as 'Below Average'. Officers ranked as outstanding will get increments twice those of others; those falling below average will not earn any increment. Priority in allocation of government housing will be given to those marked as outstanding.

‘These reforms aimed at retaining only those who are performing well and effectively filter out over time those officers whose performance is not up to the mark’ (IRC, 2021: 204).

Internal accountability

- To strengthen internal accountability the Civil Service (Efficiency and Discipline) Rules 1973 were revised in December 2020. Previously there were substantial delays in inquiries against officers due to a convoluted system whereby an authorised officer received the case, but it was later sent to another authority to decide the penalty. Under the new rules, the inquiry process has been streamlined (by removing the authorised officer tier) and made more transparent.
- Clear timelines have been set to prevent delays, with a total time of 105 days to complete the inquiry and reach a final decision.
- The concept of ‘living beyond means’ has been introduced. In cases where individuals have entered plea bargains or voluntarily returned money (obtained through corruption), disciplinary action will still be initiated against them.

Rotation policy and entry of provincial services into All-Pakistan Services

- Officers of the Pakistan Administrative Service (PAS) and the Pakistan Police Service are allowed to work both in the centre (federal government) and provinces, but most opt to remain in the latter. A compulsory rotation policy has been introduced to combat this.
- Officers cannot remain for more than ten years in one province; thereafter transfer will be mandatory. Moreover, they will have to also work in the centre.
- Promotion has now been linked to rotation: officers who remain in one province cannot be promoted to BPS 21.
- To increase provincial representation and improve their promotion prospects, officers of the Provincial Civil Services can be inducted into the Pakistan Administrative Service (one of the All-Pakistan Services) through the FPSC. To be eligible officers must have served at BPS 17 and above for twelve years, and be in BPS 19.

Promotion policy

- A new promotion policy has been created to ensure that civil service promotions are based on merit and performance.
- Rules under the policy clearly define appointing authorities, as prior to this there used to be confusion and ambiguity over who could promote employees. The composition of Central and Departmental Selection Boards (CSB, DSB) and Departmental Promotion Committees is stipulated.
- The eligibility criteria for consideration for promotion include: fulfilment of the length of service required for promotion to a post; satisfactory completion of mandatory training; possession of qualifications and experience for a post; fulfilment of all mandatory conditions of the rotation policy; fulfilment of policy for field posting, and of any other terms and conditions in force.
- Under the rules, weightage in promotion decisions will be distributed as follows: 40% for ‘Quantifications of PERs’, 30% for ‘Training Evaluation Reports’ and 30% for

‘Evaluation by CSB and DSB’. Selection boards thus have more power and authority to evaluate officers, and address the problem of inaccurate PERs (there is a tendency for seniors to always write favourable evaluation reports).

- Officers with inquiries pending against them will not be eligible for promotion until the inquiries are completed.
- To ensure transparency, where an official is deferred for promotion they will be informed of the reasons for deferral.

Directed retirement

- The (revised) Civil Services (Directory Retirement from Services) Rules were notified in April 2020, with the aim of removing inefficient officials. They allow for directed retirement of officials, and specify who has the authority to do this and the criteria to be used.
- After 20 years of service all personnel will undergo a mandatory evaluation; those falling short will be retired. The chairman of the FPSC will have the authority to direct retirements for BPS 20 and above, the secretary for BPS 17-19, and senior joint secretary for BPS 16 and below.
- Criteria for directed retirement are clearly defined to minimise bias and protect against persecution and political victimisation. They include: three annual reports of average or below-average performance; BPS 21 officers being passed over for promotion three times; officers entering plea bargains or voluntarily returning money in corruption cases; deficiency and weakness of character.
- Those affected will have the chance to have a personal hearing.

Security of tenure

- Frequent transfer of civil servants is one of the biggest problems undermining service delivery, and making officers vulnerable to political influence. To combat this, it was proposed that once officers have been appointed through proper mechanisms, they should not be transferred until the completion of tenure, i.e. a period of three years.
- Officers should only be removed from post before completing tenure in cases where disciplinary action has been taken against them for corruption, negligence of duties, insubordination, misconduct, or failure to meet assigned performance targets.
- In a cabinet decision in February 2019, it was agreed that officers appointed to BPS 21-22 should have tenure of two years, extendable to three years based on performance review by the minister in charge. As of 2021, the policy was ‘being implemented but not strictly and faithfully’ (IRC, 2021: 213).

Selection of heads of public bodies

- Since 2019 a transparent recruitment procedure has been in place, through an open merit-based competitive process. 62 positions had been filled (as of 2021) under the new procedure.

Management positions/special professionals pay scales

- In order to attract people with specialist and technical skills from the private sector/the Pakistani diaspora, two new recruitment streams had been set up: Management Positions (MP) scales and Special Professionals Pay Scales (SPPS). Positions are to be filled purely on merit through open competitive processes (i.e. from outside the civil service).
- In 2020 pay scales for MP and SP positions were significantly revised, to make them competitive with the private sector. Tenure for MP positions was raised from two to three years, and there is a mechanism to increase this further if needed.
- In addition, a new process was created to allow existing senior posts in the federal government to be converted into SPPS. As of 2021, 25 posts had already been converted in this way (IRC, 2021: 224).
- 14 posts of Technical Advisers have been created to assist ministers in charge of technical ministries – each adviser being an expert in the respective sector.

REFORMS UNDER DELIBERATION (as of 2021)

Recruitment process

- In place of the single competitive exam, which places a huge marking burden on the FPSC (creating problems of consistency, quality and equitable treatment), it is proposed that candidates be tested on three distinct aspects: i) problem-solving, analytical, and articulation ability; ii) domain-specific knowledge; and iii) cognition, aptitude, and motivation.
- The proposed induction process will comprise four stages.
 - Stage 1 – the existing compulsory section of the competitive exam is to be converted into a screening test determining problem-solving and analytical ability, as well English language.
 - Candidates clearing this (with cut-off thresholds used to ensure appropriate numbers) take Stage 2, a range of psychometric evaluations to determine aptitude and motivation.
 - Successful candidates sit Stage 3, a range of subject-specific optional exam clusters, with combinations relevant to the requirements of different occupational groups. Four exam clusters are proposed: i) for Public Administration; ii) for Public Finance, Commerce and Trade; iii) for Pakistan Police Service; and iv) for Foreign and International Affairs. The level of knowledge tested will be introductory university level.
 - The final Stage 4 will comprise interviews by the FPSC to decide a list of selected candidates in order of merit, and allocate these to different service cadres.
- It is also proposed that at least some sections of the exam process make use of IT, notably to move away from paper-based written answers towards an answer format that can be marked digitally.

Rationalisation of cadre strength and professionalism

The IRC made a number of recommendations with the overall goal of cutting the size of the civil service, and increasing skills and professionalism in the service. Some of the key proposals were:

- Not replacing (excess) personnel when incumbents retire;
- Reducing the hierarchy in each ministry from five posts to three: secretary, joint secretary and deputy secretary;
- Creating an All-Pakistan National Executive Service for senior management positions, comprising four specialised cadres for: economic management, technical, social sector management, and general management.

Latest government proposals

In February 2023, the Ministry of Planning, Development & Special Initiatives (MPD&SI) presented a number of proposals to improve the public sector. Based on extensive consultations, the key proposals are as follows (Abbas, 2023):

- **CSS exam:** there should be an option to take CSS exams in Urdu, as language should not be a barrier to the entry of talented candidates. However, the minimum criteria of 14 years of education in order to sit the CSS exam, should be raised to 16 years. There should be three professional clusters (general, finance & economics, and information) for the CSS exam at the entry level; candidates would sit one based on their professional qualifications. [This differs from the IRC's recommendation which was to divide existing officers into various categories, and faced opposition from the civil service; the new proposal only makes changes to recruitment of new officers and thus could face less resistance.]
- **Professionalism:** only relevant officials (with relevant qualifications and experience) should head the respective ministries, departments and divisions (e.g. commerce, diplomacy, engineering, medical, etc.) as secretary/directors etc.
- **Training:** Faculty at the National School of Public Policy (NSPP) and other professional training institutions should be recruited through a competitive process and their remuneration structure improved. The National University of Public Policy & Administration (NUPPA) should function on the model of the National Defence University (NDU), in particular, by inculcating data sciences and making greater use of ICT for decision-making and citizen engagement. The existing training structure should be improved by introducing senior leadership courses, and there should be training programmes for staff in BPS 1-16.
- **Strengthening FPSC:** this should be done by introducing additional members, establishing digital platforms and launching campaigns to attract civil servants from under-privileged groups and remote areas.
- **Role of Establishment Division:** This should have function as a specialised body for HR Management, career progression and organizational development, including by appointing professional HR managers at key ministries and facilitating annual performance agreements between the ministries and the PM Office.

The above proposals were shared with relevant senior officials, including from the Establishment Division, Health, Education, the NSPP and FPSC. The current status of these proposals is unclear.

5. Donor support

Donor initiatives

This review found only a couple of examples of donor initiatives specifically to support civil service reform. It is likely that components of wider programmes, e.g. for education or health delivery strengthening, feature support for civil service reform/capacity building, but these were beyond the scope of this review.

World Bank: Public Sector Capacity Building Project (PCSBP)

The Public Sector Capacity Building Project (PCSBP) was a five year project (2004-2009) by the World Bank to improve the Government of Pakistan's capacity to implement its programme of economic reforms. It sought to address some of the main challenges hampering the civil service, i.e. 'filling the human resources vacuum, implementing long-term civil service reforms, and creating an environment in which to achieve a high degree of efficiency and effectiveness in the public sector' (Badshah & Timoshenko, 2019: 165).

The project's capacity building focused on three strategic areas (World Bank, n.d.):

- i) broad-based professional development of public sector officers (largely covering federal and provincial services, and ex cadre officers);
- ii) capacity enhancement of key ministries/agencies at federal and provincial ministries and divisions, including finance, planning, commerce;
- iii) strengthening regulatory agencies (then newly established) through specialised technical support for analytical studies, specialised training of officers, and procurement of equipment/materials.

The total budget for PCSBP was USD 55 million, of which an estimated USD 25 million was used on the first component (Badshah & Timoshenko, 2019: 165). This included strengthening of the FPSC, establishment of the National School of Public Policy (NSPP), and strengthening of training institutions. Under PCSBP two new programmes were launched at a total cost of USD 17 million to address capacity and technical skills gaps in the civil service: the Professional Development Programme (PDP) and the Executive Leadership Development Programme (EDLP) (Badshah & Timoshenko, 2019: 165).

UNDP: Reforms and Innovation in Government for Higher Performance Project

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is funding the Reforms and Innovation in Government project in partnership with the Ministry of Planning, Development and Special Initiatives (MPD & SI) and the PM's Office, and funded by UK FCDO. The eight year project (2015-2023) aims to 'actualize the vision of enhancing efficiency, effectiveness, transparency, and accountability of the public sector through institutional change and robust performance management' (UNDP, 2022: 1). Project achievements in 2022 included (UNDP, 2022: 2):

- A study on Executive Recruitment in Public Sector Organizations, which looked at the reasons behind delays in the recruitment process for top-level vacancies in such organizations in Pakistan.
- Supported the development of a Recruitment Manual to help streamline recruitment processes for senior positions on a contract basis.

Looking ahead

As seen in the two projects above, there is clearly scope for donors to provide technical and capacity-building support for civil service reform in Pakistan. The government's commitment to e-governance and digitisation is an especial area where donor assistance could be effective.

However, as stressed throughout this review, there is no lack of understanding of what needs to be done to reform the civil service: the challenge in Pakistan is overcoming the barriers to reform, which are largely political. Wilder (2009: 19 and 27) calls for the focus to be on these:

(F)uture progress will not depend on more donor-driven technical assessments of what needs to be done, but rather on better strategies and tactics to address the politics of civil service reform, including creating a broader constituency supporting reform.

Given the inherently political nature of civil service reform, much more attention must be given to developing political strategies and tactics to push through reforms.

This suggests that donors should perhaps support awareness-raising and advocacy efforts in addition to providing technical and capacity building assistance.

Oxford Policy Management (OPM) have produced a ten-step model for change for donors supporting public sector reforms in low and middle-income countries. The model is derived from OPM's experience of implementing the Sub-National Governance Programme in two provinces of Pakistan. Many are equally applicable to donor support for civil service reform in Pakistan. The ten steps are as follows (Akroyd, 2017):

1. Establish a strong narrative (theory of change)
2. Build a 'trusted advisor' relationship with the government
3. Establish reform teams within government
4. Take time to understand the problem and context
5. Collect evidence
6. Design context-specific solutions
7. Adopt an adaptive approach to implementation
8. Use monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) systems regularly
9. Build capacity to ensure sustainability
10. Build interdependencies to ensure irreversibility.

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Review overview

This Knowledge for Development and Diplomacy (K4DD) Rapid Evidence Review is based on 6 days of desk-based research. The K4DD research helpdesk provides rapid syntheses of a selection of recent relevant literature and international expert thinking in response to specific questions relating to international development.

Rapid Evidence Reviews are not rigorous or systematic reviews; they are intended to provide an introduction to the most important evidence related to a research question. They draw on a rapid desk-based review of published literature and consultation with subject specialists.

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